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# Not Go To Charleston?

by **Heather S. Miller** (Assistant Director for Technical Services, SUNY Albany) <hm766@cnsvox.albany.edu>

When I moved from Head of Acquisitions to Assistant Director for Technical Services, my boss said that I needed to "move on," leave acquisitions behind and focus on assistant director activities. This included the expectation that I would leave **The Charleston Conference** behind and find other more suitable venues for professional participation. Nevertheless, more than a year has passed and I have just returned from my 11th **Charleston Conference**. I've been asking myself whether I am simply a stick in the mud, unable to move on. Am I still attending the conference because Charleston in November is so delightful, the food so plentiful and good, the faces so familiar, the habit just too strong to break? Two things struck me at the 1999 conference. One, this conference is not just about acquisitions as much as it once was. The scope has widened considerably over the years, in part a reflection of the blurring lines between collection development, acquisitions, cataloging and user access issues in libraries. Second, despite the fact that others can boast longer attendance records (some since the very first **Charleston Conference**), I've been attending and working at **The Charleston Conference** long enough that it has become a marker in the passage of the year much like New Year's Day, July 4 and the arrival and departure of Daylight Savings Time.

Automation has come a long way in the nineteen years since the first conference, both in terms of the publishing industry and in the form of library management systems. That automation has knit together formerly separate activities. Formats have proliferated, complicating the acquisitions process. Licenses have brought a whole new area of concern to the entire library, affecting selection decisions, ability to purchase, equipment and software choices, questions of interlibrary loan, user education and enforcement of license terms, the latter also forcing us to confront the intrusion of contract law into library activities. In our headlong rush to embrace electronic information sources, we are occasionally reminded, by decisions such as *Tasini*, that there might be holes in that electronic record. Cataloging has crept into the acquisitions process, not just in terms of acquisitions personnel cataloging materials at point of receipt, but also in the general use of a MARC record as the order record. In some systems, anyone updating

such an order record is updating the MARC record and that's what catalogers do! Technical services has discovered the need for new positions with exotic sounding titles like Electronic Information Services Manager, some sort of latter day super person who negotiates license agreements, educates library staff about their terms, creates Web pages, and catalogs electronic resources so they will be accessible through those Web pages as well as through the library's online catalog.

Just eleven years ago, book and serial prices loomed large, the conference days were shorter, and the Meeting Street Inn offered a lovely room for \$46.00 per night. I still travel with a small remnant of the Inn's glycerine soap, carefully conserved, from one of those early affordable visits. By contrast, this year's program featured programs that reached into many areas of librarianship, some unheard of at that time. Among the most memorable, to me, partly because of their current validity and partly because they strike at librarian blind spots, were **John Secore's** discourse on booksellers' need for a new business model as a result of blending book delivery with the effects on booksellers of librarian demands for technical services and **Stephen Rhind-Tutt's** plea for a focus on content when selecting resources. Such a thought would have been ludicrous only a few years ago. What else would a bibliographer think of but content? Isn't that what we have been buying all along? Now, it is undeniable that the electronic band wagon has put software and hardware issues ahead of content. Libraries buy what they have the means to use. That went without saying when content was inside books, but now it can mean not selecting a title just because the library will not support the technology it requires.

No fewer than 33 technical services heads and 24 few library directors or associate directors,

not to mention several electronic resources coordinators and at least one head of cataloging, were among the 1999 attendees.

This indicates a scope much beyond the original fo-

cus. People at this level must find meaning in the conference given the many demands on their time and the many other conference opportunities available. I certainly did. Issues discussed at this conference impinge on every area of technical services and beyond as well.

I'm certainly not one of the conference "originals," but it has been sufficient to firmly cement this conference into my life. When I think seriously about not attending, I realize that I cannot pass it up! Not only is there too much good information and the priceless networking with colleagues, but it has become a personal seasonal marker. There are certain things I need to do before I head for Charleston: move the sheep to winter quarters, get in the winter's supply of hay, collect pine needles for garden mulch, make the autumn visit to Vermont, mail holiday gifts to England, hunt down the elusive Wolf River apples so I can make and freeze applesauce, find the winter curtains (but delay putting them up as long as possible), get my vehicle inspected. Having checked these items off my list, I can head south.

There are not such seasonal chores in the office. There is instead a layer of routine punctuated by fairly frequent crises. The most noteworthy seasonal event is the end of the fiscal year in June, the big moment when all budgets, acquisitions, student payroll, supplies, equipment, must all be spent down to zero. Of course, it is always helpful to know what the budget is by early November and see the figures in the university's system, but that didn't happen this year.

In the fall, the weather rules. Before Charleston it often holds pretty well with warm, golden days still possible even after the loss of Daylight Saving Time. After Charleston, we are nose to nose with the middle of the month, the weather rapidly deteriorates into cold, dark, ice and snow and it's a straight run to Thanksgiving, the holidays, the darkest time of the year, New Year's.

Sometime along in there, a box arrives with a Charleston return address. It will contain the evaluation forms from the conference. Having been perused by Katina, they are ready for input into software that will spit out numbers and assemble comments to help us analyze what it all meant. Planning for the next conference had already begun. One of the first years that I handled the conference evaluations, my son thought that this box, which arrived a few days before December 25, was a Christmas present. I've never quite been able to see 100+ forms in quite that light, but perhaps I should! 

